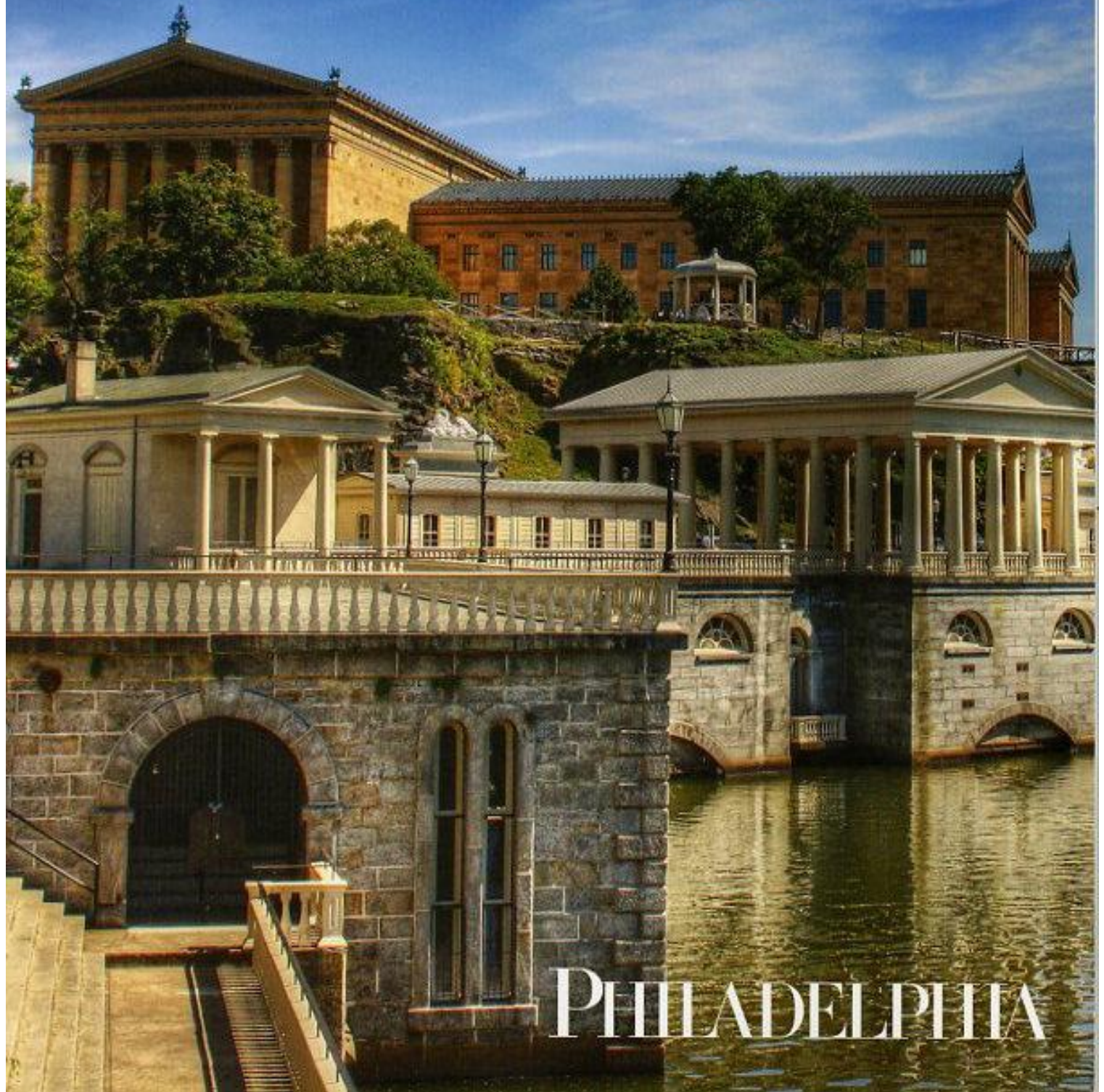


*The Magazine*

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# ANTIQUES



PHILADELPHIA





*By Jamie M. Allen*

Over the past 150 years, photographers of all kinds have worked within each of the fifty-nine spaces we now call national parks, creating government documents, promotional materials, personal memories, and works of art. In the earliest years, photographs and photographers played a crucial role in the movement to set aside lands for "public use, resort, and recreation." From that moment forward, photographs have continued to shape our relationship to these lands. Without them, conservation efforts would not have been successful in blocking land development, nor would the spaces have become symbols of national pride. Photographs now permeate our understanding of each park, so much so that we may not even need to visit a space to feel that we are connected to it, and if we do go, we seek out the vistas and vantage points that have become familiar to us through photographs.

To mark the one hundredth anniversary of the National Park Service, the George Eastman Museum

Fig. 1. *Alvin Langdon Coburn at the Grand Canyon* by Fannie E. Coburn (1848–1928), 1911. Gelatin silver print, 11 ½ by 3 ¾ inches. *The photographs shown are in the George Eastman Museum. Bequest of Alvin Langdon Coburn.*

Fig. 2. *One hundred and five years of photographs and seventeen million years of landscapes; Panorama from Yavapai Point on the Grand Canyon connecting photographs by Ansel Adams, Alvin Langdon Coburn, and the Detroit Publishing Company by Mark C. Klett (1952–) and Byron Wolfe (1967–), 2007.* Inkjet print, 22 by 60 inches. *Gift of the artists © Mark C. Klett and Byron Wolfe.*

# Framing Nature



*A century and a half of photographs at the George Eastman Museum illuminate the shifting significance of our national parks*





Fig. 3. *Grand Cañon, Colorado River, Near Paria Creek, Looking West* by William H. Bell (1830–1910), 1872. Albumen silver print, 10 3/4 by 7 7/8 inches.

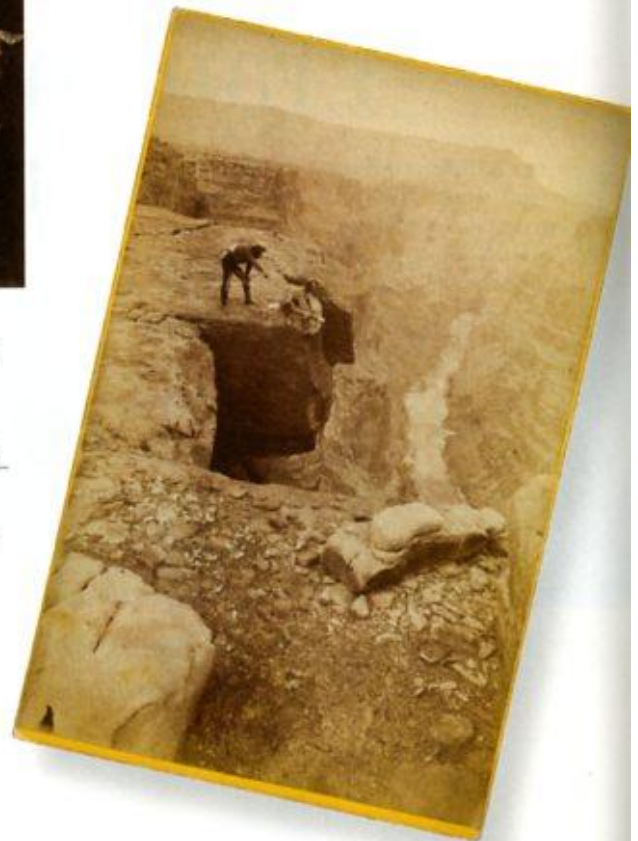
Fig. 4. *Thomas Moran—standing figure—Grand Cañon of the Colorado River, North Rim of the Cañon*, by John K. Hillers (1843–1925), 1873. Albumen silver print, 6 3/4 by 4 1/2 inches (image).

Fig. 5. *Jacob's Ladder, 2255 Feet Below the Rim* by Kolb Brothers, 1913, from the book *The Grand Canyon of Arizona*. Collotype with applied color, 9 3/4 by 7 7/8 inches.

has delved into its collection to illuminate the parks' symbiotic relationship with photography both past and present. To choose just one sublime example from its exhibition *Photography and America's National Parks*, the images of the Grand Canyon on view begin with the documentary images of this natural marvel in the early nineteenth century and include along the way the works of the pictorialists, snapshots created by and for tourists, impassioned defenses of the park's preservation, and a range of artistic responses by contemporary photographers, some of which parse the medium of photography itself.

Now the second most visited of our national parks,<sup>1</sup> the Grand Canyon region was one of the last spaces to be mapped during the period of intensive land exploration just after the Civil War. The first photographs of the canyon were made by two expeditionary parties that braved the waters of the Colorado River. Timothy O'Sullivan and William H. Bell both worked with Lieutenant (later Captain) George Wheeler on the Geographical Surveys West of the One Hundredth Meridian. Bell photographed more extensively in the canyon area, creating photographs that capture its monumentality and sometimes verge into abstract forms (see Fig. 3).

Similarly, John Wesley Powell led expeditionary trips between 1869 and 1873 that explored the paths of the Green and Colorado Rivers; his crew is noted as the

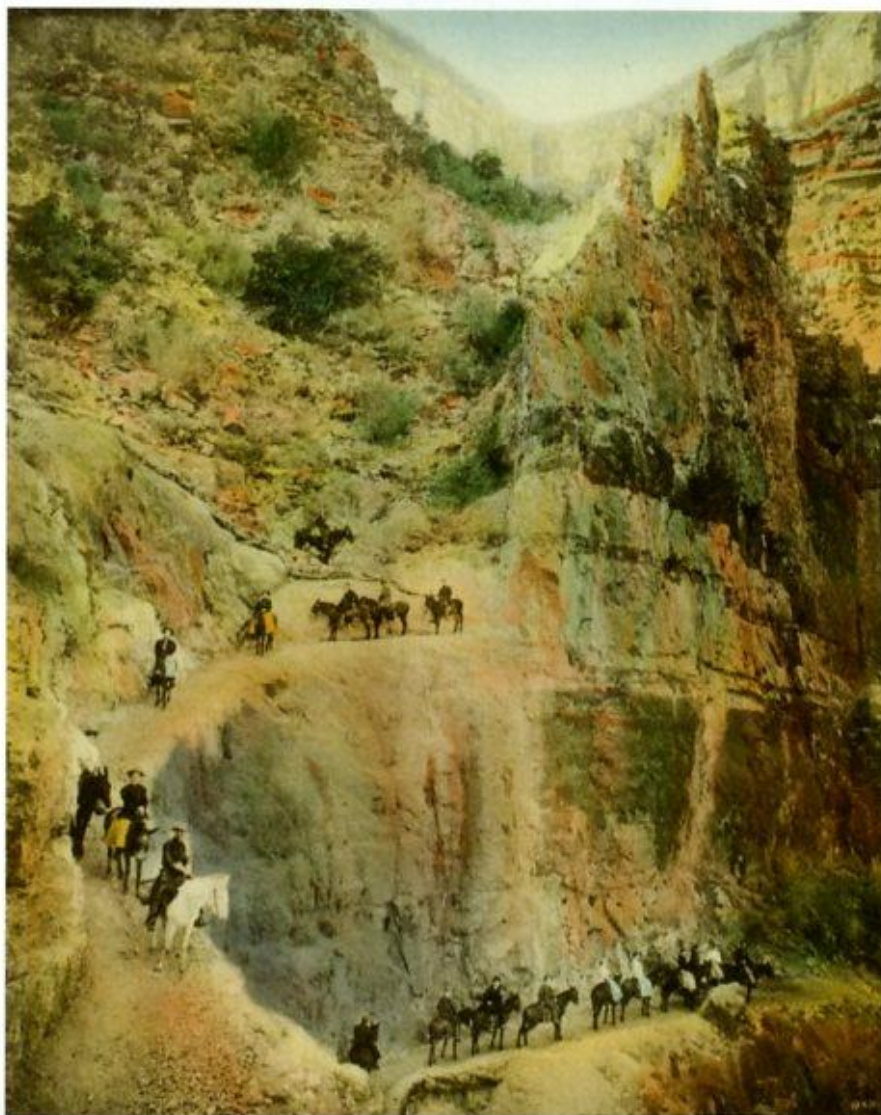




first group of white men to traverse the entire Grand Canyon region. On his second journey, Powell brought photographer John K. Hillers, who worked alongside painter Thomas Moran to capture the geographic features of the region (see Fig. 4).<sup>2</sup> Photographs by Bell and Hillers were widely distributed to East Coast audiences (including politicians in Washington, D.C., to gain further appropriations for continued survey trips), as well as rendered into engravings and published in reports about the surveys.

**D**espite the attention these expeditionary photographs received, the Grand Canyon did not achieve National Park status until 1919. Preservation efforts were successful before that, however, in declaring various portions a national forest (1893), a game preserve (1906), and a national monument (1908). Thus, by 1919 the park was already well known through photographs and had become an established tourist destination, especially after connections to the transcontinental railroad by 1901 made getting to the canyon easier. Despite the emergence of the snapshot camera in 1888, which allowed (wealthy) visitors to take their own photographs of the chasm, the Kolb Brothers, photographers specializing in views of the canyon, established a photographic business at the top of the Bright Angel Trail in 1904. They made portraits of tourists riding mules into the canyon that they then developed and sold to their patrons as they ascended out of the canyon (see Fig. 5). The brothers were also the first to film a journey down the white-water rapids of the Colorado River, and they presented the film for visitors at their studio along with lantern slides and a lecture by Emory Kolb, until his death in 1976.<sup>3</sup>

While snapshots taken from the rim of the canyon abound, several established pictorialist photographers made significant photographs that show the canyon's mystique and grandeur.<sup>4</sup> Alvin Langdon Coburn (Fig. 1) visited the canyon during his West Coast travels in



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*From the first exploration of the lands in the 1860s and 1870s to the Instagrammers who post photographs on the web today, our understanding of these spaces has been developed through photography*

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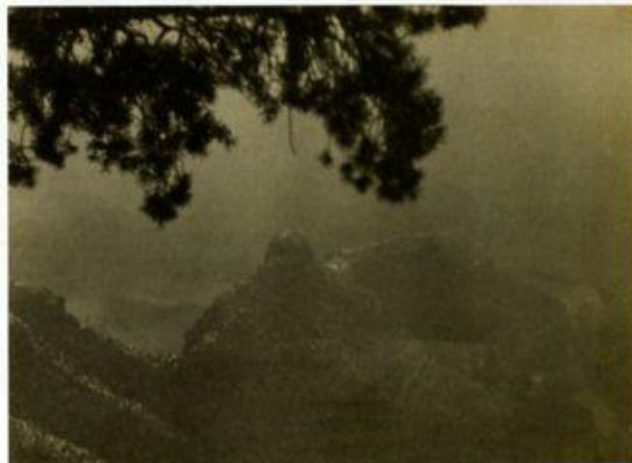


1911 and 1912. He was strongly influenced by the landscape, creating abstract views with stacked features (see Fig. 6).<sup>5</sup> One of his traveling companions was Arthur Wesley Dow, who had taught Coburn his love of craft and composition, no doubt inspiring Coburn's ability to balance light and dark elements in his work.<sup>6</sup> Dow, too, photographed at the canyon's edge, creating photographic aids for his paintings of the site that have been noted as a transitional point in his work (see Fig. 7).<sup>7</sup> Coburn may have also inspired pictorialist photographer Karl Struss to photograph the Grand Canyon. After serving in the U.S. Army during World War I, Struss sought to make a new life for himself in Hollywood. On his trip west, he stopped at the Grand Canyon—perhaps remembering Coburn's correspondence about its grandeur—and made photographs that he later printed and entered into photographic salons.<sup>8</sup> Like Coburn and Dow, Struss flattens the space, stacking the features and employing surprising foreground elements such as a tree branch that hangs at the top of the frame (see Fig. 8).

Tourism continued to increase, and by 1941 annual visitation was ten times what it was in 1919.<sup>9</sup> This can be attributed to the onset of car culture and a national infrastructure of roadways that allowed the parks to be promoted as places to visit during a family road trip, with comfortable lodgings and well-built roads to make every view accessible to anyone arriving by car. While most visitors brought

their own cameras, making what have become standard views of the park, the National Park Service also published photographically illustrated postcards that visitors sent to friends and family, perpetuating the idea of the park as a premier destination.

But not everyone saw the addition of roads, restaurants, and campsites as improvements to the park. Indeed, groups such as the Sierra Club have long sought to protect the park from various proposals, including those to build dams in the canyon or permit logging on its northern rim.<sup>10</sup> These campaigns are often supported with photographs, typified in the work of such photographers as Eliot Porter, Philip Hyde (see Fig. 10), and Ansel Adams. Adams's relationship with the Sierra Club began in 1920 when he was the caretaker of its LeConte Memorial Lodge located in the Yosemite Valley, and later he was elected to the board of directors.<sup>11</sup> Adams's photographs of the pure landscape became known worldwide, influencing the next generation of photographers and inspiring his viewers to pursue the continued preservation of the American wilderness.



By the 1970s photography was well established as an artistic medium and photographers began to reflect on how it is used to portray space and time. Marcia Resnick's little-known series *See* includes an image of a young man standing on a rock wall at the rim of the Grand Canyon (Fig. 11). His stance echoes that of so many before and after him; it is one of silence and reverence. While Resnick's framing emphasizes the sheer expanse of the canyon, her photograph is about the visitor's consumption of this natural wonder. John Pfahl employs a different kind of framing in his series *Picture Windows*, emphasizing the ways in which photographers selectively frame and crop a view (see Fig. 9). In these

Fig. 6. *Grand Canyon* by Alvin Langdon Coburn (1882–1966), c. 1911. Platinum print, 16 ¼ by 12 ½ inches. *Bequest of the photographer.*

Fig. 7. *Snow at the Grand Canyon, Arizona* by Arthur Wesley Dow (1857–1922), c. 1911. Gelatin silver print, 4 ¼ by 3 ¾ inches. *Gift of Barbara Wright.*

Fig. 8. *Grand Canyon* by Karl E. Struss (1886–1981), 1919. Platinum print, 9 ¾ by 13 ¾ inches. *Gift of Steven and Claudia Schwartz.*



Fig. 9. *North Rim Highway, Grand Canyon, Arizona* from the series *Picture Windows* by John Pfahl (1939–), 1980. Chromogenic development print, 19 7/8 by 23 7/8 inches. *Gift of the photographer* © John Pfahl.

works, Pfahl freezes a view that is further restricted by a window, the borders of which accentuate how the vantage has been framed. By comparison, in their book *Reconstructing the View* Mark Klett and Byron Wolfe use historic landscape photographs alongside their contemporary images; by layering images created from many time periods and for a range of purposes, they portray the passing of time through the historiography of the space as written in photographs (see Fig. 2). The resulting constructions bring to mind the relatively short amount of time that we have been able to record these spaces when compared to the millions of years that it has taken nature to shape them.

The photographs shown here illustrate the history of a single place, but a similar narrative can be outlined for

most sites now managed by the National Park Service. From the first exploration of the lands in the 1860s and 1870s to the thousands of Instagrammers who post photographs on the web today, our understanding of these spaces has been developed through the photographic lens. The exhibition *Photography and America's National Parks* and the accompanying book *Picturing America's National Parks* (forthcoming from Aperture) expand upon these ideas, laying out a journey from the designation of Yosemite as the first protected land in the United States<sup>12</sup> to contemporary photographic visions that may tell us more about the medium of photography than they do about the spaces that they depict. The exhibition will be on view at the George Eastman Museum from June 4 to October 2.



<sup>1</sup>The Grand Canyon was second only to Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 2014, according to the National Park Service, "Annual Park Ranking Report for Recreation Visitors in: 2014," [irma.nps.gov](http://irma.nps.gov), accessed January 10, 2016; and National Park Service, "National Parks Draw Record-Breaking Crowds in 2014," news release, February 17, 2015, [home.nps.gov](http://home.nps.gov), accessed January 10, 2016. <sup>2</sup>Hillers was the third photographer to work with Powell on the surveys of these regions, being preceded by E. O. Beaman and James Fennemore. See Don D. Fowler, foreword, in John Wesley Powell, *Down the Colorado: Diary of the First Trip Through the Grand Canyon 1869* (E. P. Dutton, New York, 1969), pp. 11, 21; and [John Wesley Powell], *Explorations of the Colorado River of the West and its Tributaries...* (Washington, D. C., 1875). <sup>3</sup>For more on their journey down the Colorado River, see Ellsworth L. Kolb, *Through the Grand Canyon from Wyoming to Mexico* (Macmillan, New York, 1915). <sup>4</sup>Pictorialism was an artistic movement in photography at the turn of the twentieth century marked by an emphasis on the role of the photographer through the use of hand-coated emulsions. Proponents of the movement resisted the idea that photography was an entirely mechanical medium and worked to have their photographs exhibited alongside paintings and other fine arts. <sup>5</sup>Emily Ballew Neff, *The Modern West: American Landscapes 1890–1950* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006), p. 85. <sup>6</sup>Dow refers to this technique as *notan*; see *ibid.*, pp. 79–80. <sup>7</sup>James Enycart, *Harmony of Reflected Light: The Photographs of Arthur Wesley Dow* (Museum of New Mexico Press, Santa Fe, 2001), p. 34; and Ballew Neff, *The Modern West*, pp. 81–83. <sup>8</sup>Barbara McCandless, Bonnie Yochelson, Richard Koszarski, *New York to Hollywood: The Photography of Karl Struss* (Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Tex., and University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1995), pp. 25, 51. <sup>9</sup>National Park Service, "Annual Park Recreation Visitation: Grand Canyon

NP, 1919–2014," accessed January 10, 2016, [irma.nps.gov](http://irma.nps.gov). <sup>10</sup>For details about the Sierra Club's efforts to protect the park, see [vault.sierraclub.org/history/timeline.aspx](http://vault.sierraclub.org/history/timeline.aspx). <sup>11</sup>See [anseladams.com/gallery-history](http://anseladams.com/gallery-history), accessed January 10, 2016, and "History of LeConte Memorial Lodge," [sierraclub.org](http://sierraclub.org), accessed February 16, 2016. <sup>12</sup>Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Grant Act in 1864, granting the Yosemite Valley and neighboring Mariposa Big Tree Grove to the state of California for the express purpose of preserving the space for public recreation.

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Fig. 10. *Dune at Granite Falls, Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona* by Philip Hyde (1921–2006), 1956. Gelatin silver print, printed 1957. 9 1/2 by 13 1/2 inches. © Philip Hyde Photography.

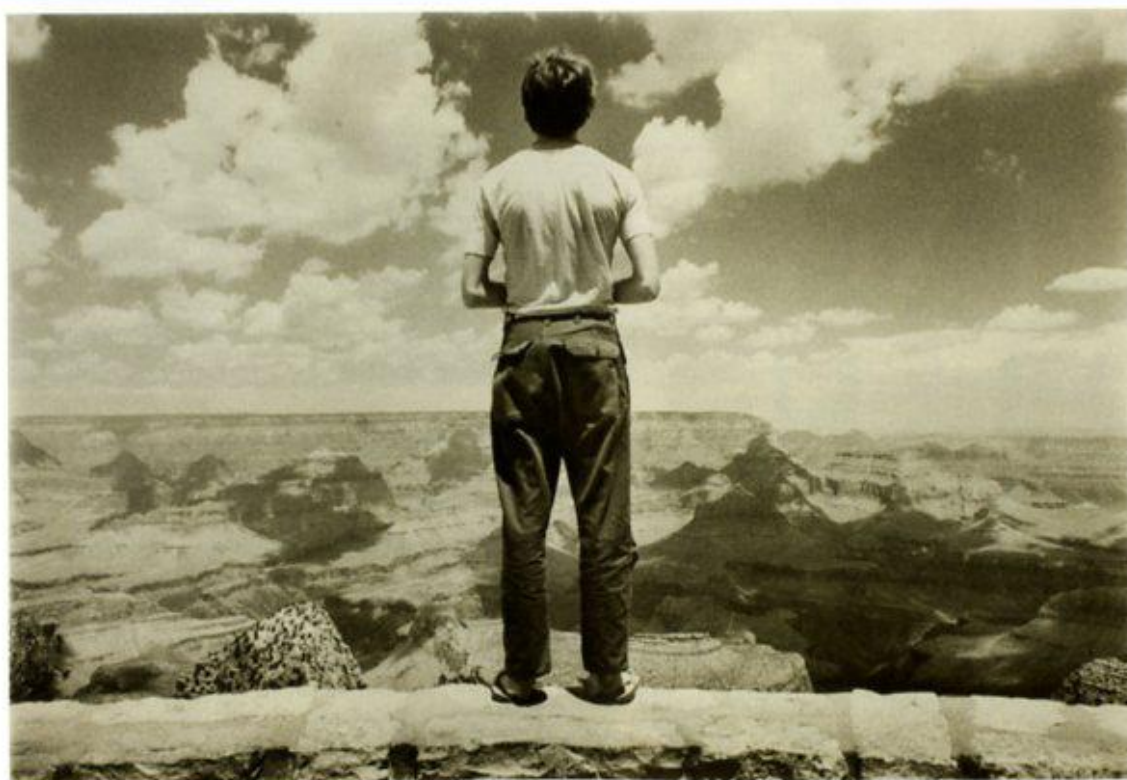


Fig. 11. *Untitled #10* from the series *See* by Marcia Resnick (1950–), 1974. Gelatin silver print, 10 3/4 by 15 3/4 inches. © Marcia Resnick.